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BULLETIN

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DEALING WITH

Co-operative and Collective Farming

Issued in view of
The Saskatchewan Government's proposed
Experiments in Socialized Agriculture.

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IT SEEMS to be the general impression, particularly among farmers in Canada, that the C.C.F. party's proposed national economy contemplates socialization of all industry and services, *but not agriculture*. That is to say, that while all the other people of Canada will become servants of government or state owned trusts the farmers alone will remain in possession of their lands and absolutely free to carry on agricultural pursuit, buying where and as they wish and selling their products as and when and where they desire, and shall be permitted to retain profits which may result, carrying on entirely free enterprise.

This is evidently wrong and contrary to written policy in C.C.F. literature. The "Regina Manifesto," under the heading of "Agriculture," includes among other things encouragement of producers' and consumers' co-operatives. This is amplified in Messrs. Lewis and Scott's book titled "MAKE THIS YOUR CANADA," at page 168. After enumerating seven remedies for agriculture, item number 8 reads:

"Lastly, but perhaps more important than all else, encouragement and assistance in the development of co-operative farm communities."

This part of the C.C.F. program is couched in relatively mild language, but, nevertheless, it can have only one meaning, i.e., socialization of farming.

It would be discounting the intelligence of the planners of the C.C.F. program to suggest that they are not fully aware of the fact that it is utterly impossible to have state ownership of industry, financial institutions and services and leave farming as the only free enterprise. Regimenting the people of a nation and making of them servants of government trusts inevitably reduces their standards of living and deprives them of all civil rights and liberties for the main reason that such an order can only be maintained under strict dictatorship. It is, therefore, obvious that leaving a section of the people to enjoy the right of free enterprise would bring down upon them the envy and jealousy of the rest of the population, so that to prevent civil war the dictatorship is compelled to socialize agriculture also. Indeed, this fact has been very clearly demonstrated elsewhere.

So long as the C.C.F. program remained only a theory, the leaders of the party could well afford to let the impression prevail that farmers alone are to be left to carry on free enterprise; but now that the C.C.F. government has been elected in Saskatchewan, the leaders there realize that if any of the program is to be put into effect, the socialization of agriculture must be started simultaneously with socialization of other industries and services. The speech from the throne at the opening of the Saskatchewan legislature early in October of 1944 forecast, among other legislative measures, the creation of farm co-operative communities.

The Honourable John Sturdy, Minister of Reconstruction, Labour and Public Welfare of Saskatchewan, voiced the opinion that the farmers of Canada are tired of their individual farming efforts and are prepared to abandon free enterprise in agriculture to embrace co-operative farming. The minister further stated that it is the intention of the government to start by establishing a few co-operative farms experimentally in the four natural farming areas of Saskatchewan, namely, the pioneer or northern bush area, the park lands, the prairie and the irrigated areas. Mr. Sturdy suggests co-operative farms comprising not less than fifty square miles each and not less than one hundred families in each co-operative. The minister uses the term "co-operative farming" rather than collective farming, but says that the co-operative farms shall be operated on the basis of common ownership of property and a common purse.

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The terms co-operative agricultural production units, co-operative farms and collective farms, have in many places been used as interchangeable. However, it is necessary to distinguish between a group of people farming on adjoining or contiguous lands, co-operating in their effort but having individual and not joint ownership of land and chattels, and a group of people living on land, working together and having common ownership of land and chattels and having a common purse. Here, therefore, co-operative agricultural effort short of a common purse will be referred to as co-operative farming, and joint group farming with a common purse will be referred to as collective farming.

The C.C.F. plan, therefore, as forecast in Saskatchewan, will be termed as collective farming. The Government of Saskatchewan will expropriate lands presently owned by individual farmers in order to obtain contiguous areas of fifty square miles and place thereon groups of one hundred families, forming collective farms, and will enact laws under which these collective farms will be operated. This will be the first start in any province in Canada of socialized agriculture.

Experiments in collective and in co-operative farming have been made in many parts of the world and in various times in history. An amazing number of collective and co-operative farming experiments have been made in Canada and there is a mass of data on the subject available. Altogether, it can be said that while co-operation among individual farmers has in the main been successful, no collective farming effort so far has produced successful results.

MENNONITES

Early pioneers in co-operative farming by free men were the Mennonites. This sect was founded by Menno Seiman in Germany in the 16th century. Reading the early history of the sect it appears that Seiman believed that good Christian people must remain peasants and tillers of the soil. He, therefore, made it part of their religion that they should not engage in commerce nor practice professions so that they would not be in competition with people outside of their own communities.

A large number of Mennonites moved from Germany to Russia about the year 1774. One hundred years later, in 1874, several thousand families came to Canada, settling first in Manitoba, south and southwest of Winnipeg. In Canada the Mennonites prospered and multiplied so that by 1918 they had established a number of other sizable settlements in Saskatchewan and Alberta. These people brought with them from Russia a system and measure of co-operation quite remarkable for that time. Their method of colonization was to establish villages of from twenty to thirty farmers in each village. The homestead rights in Canada at that time provided for one hundred and sixty acres for each settler. The typical Mennonite colony, therefore, occupied an area of six square miles. As near as possible to the centre of that area they built their farm yards in two rows across a road from each other. The width of the farm yards was approximately one hundred and fifty yards each, running back from the centre street or road half a mile so as to provide a small pasture behind each farm yard. In the centre of the village were located a school house and church. At one end of the village a square mile of land was fenced as a common or community pasture for the cattle herds of the villagers. The rest of the land was resurveyed into strips of approximately two hundred yards wide and half a mile long. These strips were numbered and classified for distance from the village proper and were divided among the villagers equally in such manner that each one had approximately an equal area of tillable

land and approximately equally distant from the village. However, the ownership of the land did not change. Each one retained title to the original one hundred and sixty acre homestead, but by agreement the villagers farmed those areas which were allotted to them for cultivation under the resurvey plan. The village agreement further provided that no one of their number could either lease or sell their property without the unanimous consent of all the other members of the village.

Aside from co-operating to the extent of pooling their land for convenience of all, they owned co-operatively breeding-sires, threshing machines and other large equipment. In addition there was a wide measure of co-operation, as in the case of someone in the village becoming ill the others combined to plant or harvest the crops or to do any other work which the farm required at the time. Threshing of grain in the fall was done by the entire membership of the village. The work of raising new buildings was done co-operatively—all this, of course, entirely without charge. Actually these people carried on their farming operations as individuals in so far as each one and his family were able to do so and worked co-operatively in any case where a number of workers were required. There was a remarkable degree of harmony and agreement between them.

In addition to co-operative efforts of the people of each village, the Mennonites brought with them some remarkable institutions of general community co-operation. They had an excellent system of mutual fire insurance. An elder in each village was responsible for the collection of premiums from the villagers. The amount of such premiums was based upon the fire losses of the previous year, with provisions for a special levy in case of increased losses during the current year. The extent of protection granted on any farm yard was not in excess of one-third of the value of the buildings. Records show that the rates were exceedingly low. The total cost of administration for an entire colony comprising twenty to thirty villages was customarily \$50.00 per annum. The villager who suffered a fire loss could at best buy only lumber and other building materials necessary for the reconstruction of his buildings from the insurance money. Much of the labour of rebuilding was done by the other villagers. Quite without prescribed obligation and entirely spontaneously the members of the village and sometimes friends or relatives residing in other villages brought furniture, clothes, livestock—in fact anything lost in the fire—so that except for the inconvenience involved the position of a villager suffering a loss was in due course fully restored.

Another remarkable institution which the Mennonites brought with them and operated in Canada was what was known in their language as "The Waisenamt." Literally translated it would appear to mean an orphans' institute. Actually it was something in the nature of a mutual trust organization. On the death of any head of a Mennonite family the land, equipment and livestock were immediately sold by auction. Surviving heirs had a right to bid and buy at the auction but could do so only on the same terms as any other member of the community. Of the proceeds one-third went to the surviving spouse and two-thirds to the children, or to relatives of the deceased if there were no children surviving. The Waisenamt retained the funds of infant heirs until they reached maturity.

Trust funds were loaned by the Waisenamt to young married men to assist them in buying land and establishing themselves as farmers. Loans were made on the verbal promise of the borrower to pay, with the verbal guarantee of two other members of the community. No documents were drawn and no signatures were given, because it was contrary to the religion of Mennonites to commit themselves to any obligation

by signature or to take an oath in verification. An elder who acted as secretary and treasurer of the Waisenamt merely recorded the loan in a book. A typical entry constituting the sole record would read:

"On January 2nd, 1895, Peter Funk borrowed \$500.00. His guarantors were—John Martin and Jacob Rempel."

So long as the Mennonites adhered faithfully to their religion and remained resident in the villages there were recorded no defaults on any Waisenamt loans.

More recent history of these people shows that as members of the community departed from the strict adherence to the tenets of their religion communities broke up. Co-operation among them became less and less until today only a very small percentage of the Mennonites in Canada still live in villages and adhere closely to their old customs. Most of them, like other Canadians, live on individual farms and carry on quite independently.

HUTTERITES

Another sect organized in Western Europe in the 16th century moved later to Russia and in 1874 to the United States, coming to Canada in the years immediately following the World War of 1914-18. These people, known as Hutterites, farm in groups of approximately twenty families on each farm, having common ownership of property and a common purse, and are indeed collective farmers. They are in their own light deeply religious and strictly orthodox. In fact they must be termed a priesthood. They deem their properties to be owned by the church and themselves as brethren of a religious order and servants of the church. There have been many defections and partitions of colonies. When they left Russia in 1874 those still adhering strictly to their religion and method of living comprised only some sixty families in three groups or colonies. However, they are a prolific people and in the seventy years of their residence on this continent, in the United States and Canada they have prospered and multiplied until now there are nearly forty colonies, mostly in Manitoba and Alberta, with three or four still in the United States.

Economically, their method of living together and farming collectively has been rather successful, but they have been compelled to make enormous sacrifices in order to retain their customs and identity. The men all wear beards; men and women wear homemade clothes of a style and custom of three hundred years ago. They have absolutely no musical instruments and no form of relaxation or amusement whatsoever. They live closely cloistered lives in so far as possible out of communication with all other people, and struggle continuously in resisting the changes brought about by time and progress of civilization. In recent years the people of Southern Alberta, where a number of Hutterite colonies are located, have found that the large land holdings of these colonies are detrimental to community developments and have in fact proposed rather stringent measures to restrict the further expansion of Hutterite holdings within the Province of Alberta.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Hutterites of this continent have multiplied and prospered, there have been a substantial number of defections. In some cases in Alberta entire colonies have broken away from the association. In other cases individuals have merely walked off the colony to live as ordinary independent people. There probably would have been many more defections except for the fact that the colonies do not permit any member of a colony to take any part of the land, stock or equipment with them. In so far as the membership is concerned, what it actually

amounts to is that the individuals work to gain merely the food and the uniform clothes which they wear.

Other Canadian farmers residing in the neighbourhood of Hutterite colonies, who have closely observed life on a collective farm as exemplified by the Hutterites, have not deemed that mode of life as attractive. Indeed, experience has shown that only by the closest adherence to the orthodoxy of their religion and a very humble manner of living can a colony exist, and the slightest deviation from their medieval way of life appears to disintegrate them.

OTHER COLLECTIVE FARMING EXPERIMENTS

In the years 1924-29 there came to Canada some 50,000 Mennonites who had farmed as individuals in Russia. These people were out of sympathy with the Soviet Government and were compelled to leave there without financial resources. Indeed shipping and railway companies advanced their transportation from Russia to various points in Western Canada.

Many Canadian owners of large farms sold their properties to groups of these later Mennonite immigrants, supplying them with stock, equipment, seed and other assistance, so as to set them up in established farms. In most cases these farms had excellent buildings, full equipment and ample livestock. It was thought that destitute people transported to excellent farm areas could and would be ready to co-operate and work together to the extent of operating these large properties as collective farms. However, experience has shown that not one of those groups held together. In fact many of them broke up within the first year. Most of them dissolved within three or four years. There were some outstanding cases, where a group of ten or twelve families who were friends and close neighbours in Russia, some of them even closely related, were settled on excellent properties and given every assistance and opportunity to carry on collectively at what would appear as of best advantage to them. Even in those cases the individualistic tendencies inherent in farmers militated against their remaining together and working for the common good of the group.

COLLECTIVE FARM EXPERIMENT IN RUSSIA

For a real experiment in collective farming in modern times one has to go to Russia. Prior to the revolution of 1917 Russia had more people living on the land than any other country populated by people of the white race in the world. There is authentic evidence that Lenin promised the agricultural peasants of Russia that they would not be disturbed. On the contrary, that whereas under the Imperial Russian regime a large proportion of the farmers were tenants from large land holders, if the revolution succeeded the farmers were to be given permanent tenure of the lands they occupied, either as owners or as renters from the state at such rentals as they could well afford to pay. It is highly probable that in this the revolutionary leaders were absolutely sincere. Nevertheless, in due course as the state took over all other industries and services, the position of both the state and the farmers became untenable.

The Russian Government in the earlier 1920's "encouraged" co-operative productive units, both by publicity and persuasion and by demonstration. They established a number of state owned large community farms at various centres in the agricultural areas of the country. The Russian farmers did not respond to encouragement and persuasion and the government tried to discourage individual farms by levying heavy taxation in kind; that is to say, taking large parts of the grains and

livestock products of the individual farmers as taxes. Even this did not bring about voluntary agreement to collective farming. It was then, about the year 1929, that the Russian Government inaugurated the measure of compulsion. This was resisted by the individual farmers to approximate civil war. Disturbances and dislocations reached a state where there was actual famine in Russia for nearly three years.

In the files of Russian newspapers of the years 1929-32 is to be found much reference to the resistance of the individual farmers and the measures applied to compel them to surrender their holdings. It was then that the term "Kulak" was coined. This was a name given to any individual farmer who had gained a relatively comfortable condition by his industry and application in operating his individual farm. The enormous number of farmers who perished in that period of strife and the number who were banished to the Northern hinterlands of Russia is not known, but admittedly the numbers were substantial in both cases. It is not sought here to criticize Russia nor their form of government, nor the manner in which they brought about the revolutionary economic changes there, but it becomes necessary to deal with the facts when exploring the subject of collective farming.

In the years following the revolution, Russia's production of consumer goods was very low. The industrial workers' standard of living had declined to such an extent that compared to them those living on the land seemed comfortable and prosperous. Returning other industry and services to private ownership seemed impossible so the government was compelled to socialize agriculture in order to pacify the rest of the population.

After collective farming or socialized agriculture became a fact in Russia, in the years following the famine of the early 1930's and even up to the year preceding the war, the Russian method of farming could not compare to that of Canada or the United States. Production per capita in Russian agriculture was but a small fraction of that of the Canadian farmers. A Russian collective farm of 5,000 acres would have a population of seven or eight hundred. Forty working people on a Canadian farm would produce as much or more. To keep the collective farms in operation at all the Government of Russia supplied equipment, livestock and fertilizer, and took a share of the crop. Production was so small that the crop share taken by the government was barely sufficient to feed the rest of the population. Russian acreage under cultivation, if producing comparable to Canadian standards, would create enormous exportable surpluses. Even in the best years in Russia from 1934-38 no farm products were available for export from that country. It was clearly obvious that when the farmers were deprived of their individual holdings and endeavours the incentive to produce disappeared. All workers were merely farm hands and as such had nothing to gain by production in excess of their own immediate needs.

The collective farming experiment in Russia was observed thoroughly and at close range by several Canadian agriculturists who spent considerable time and travelled a great deal in the Soviet Union. Their findings were uniform and fully confirmed by the late Dr. E. Cora Hind, the famous agricultural editor of the *Manitoba Free Press*, who made an extended trip through agricultural Russia in the late 1930's.

Reports coming out of Russia now are to the effect that the people are working exceedingly hard to produce to the utmost of their possibility. This is quite understandable. Their country was overrun by a common enemy and soldiers and workers alike have made and are making magnificent sacrifices in the common aim to expel and defeat that enemy. What will be the condition in the Russian agricultural industry

after the war is exceedingly difficult to foretell. Indeed there are indications that the Russian Government is preparing to make extensive reforms in their entire economy. Statements from responsible sources now indicate that the government there, after twenty-five years of an enormous and exceedingly costly experiment, is prepared to eliminate a big part of the regimentation and to revert to a much more moderate system of government. It may well be that Russian agriculture will revert to individual farming.

In Canada farmers generally have always co-operated in a large measure. The most pleasant features of a life spent on the farm are recollections of countless instances where farmers voluntarily assisted each other in many ways. Then, of course, Canadians have made great strides in co-operative marketing. Selling by method of pooling their production of wheat, wool, livestock and dairy products has in a large measure been successful. Co-operative retail stores have not succeeded in Canada as well as one would expect. There are precedents in the United Kingdom and in the Scandinavian countries of successful co-operative buying, so that there are grounds to believe that after some further experiments co-operation in buying among Canadian farmers will also prove more successful.

The Government of Saskatchewan is very properly giving considerable thought to the colonization of those of our returning fighting men who came from farm homes or who might be inclined to engage in agriculture. Colonization of returned men after the war of 1914 was only in a small part successful. Learning from other co-operative farming methods it would almost appear that some part of the Mennonite system could be adopted. It might be well to settle a group of farmers in villages, co-operating in every extent short of a common purse, in so far as that is possible without forcing existing farmers in the area off their lands. A group of forty or fifty families having their farm yards in close proximity to each other in villages could have the advantage of churches, schools and social amenities in addition to modern conveniences. A group of returned men settling on land in that manner may still require substantial financial support for the period of development, and should in every case have the advantage of guidance from thoroughly efficient and experienced agriculturists.

It appears to be that farming more than any other line of endeavour is a business for the individual. Farmers have strong preferences for methods of working, types of equipment and breeds of livestock. In every province of the Dominion from ocean to ocean there live hundreds of thousands of farmers, not only of the original Anglo-Saxon and French-Canadian stock, but many of them of first, second and third generation immigrants from continental Europe, who are splendid citizens. The homes and farms are comfortable and clean, livestock breeds highly developed and farming methods the most modern. They are in every term successful farmers. They enjoy the respect and admiration of their neighbours around them and can always be depended upon to render ready and magnanimous assistance when anyone is in need. During the war in very many cases one or more sons are in the fighting services, the parents at home carrying on. They are making super-human efforts to produce more food in the war effort and have the farms and homes fit for returning sons when the war is over.

These farmers are the backbone of our country. There are no better people anywhere. Certainly nothing should be done to disturb them. It would be the worst tragedy which could befall our country if this class of farmers were to be deprived of their lands and regimented into collectives, with all that implies. It is quite

remarkable that among farmers all over Canada one rarely finds two families working together on any one farm. Groups of three families on one farm probably do not exist. It cannot be that farmers have not thought in the past that there might be some economic advantage in grouping themselves together. Therefore, it must be accepted that the farmers of Canada are thoroughly convinced that in so far as the operation of a farm is concerned they are happier as individuals rather than in groups.

From enquiries among a large number of farmers in the four Western Provinces, Ontario and Quebec, no sentiment in favour of collective farming was found. The impression is widespread among farmers throughout Canada that their industry is subject to excessive variations in the value of its products. The industry is such that farmers cannot accumulate sufficient reserves during the short periods when farm product prices are high to enable them to withstand acute depressions.

A strong case indeed can be made out in favour of the permanent stabilization of agriculture and other primary industries in Canada. It is the intention of this Bureau to issue a further bulletin on that subject in the near future.



